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Wood chip pile ABS testing reveal asbestos

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The Western News |

Results of activity-based testing of the wood chip piles on Port Authority property on Libby's southern edge has returned just one positive result, according to the Environmental Protection Agency's team leader for Libby.

Victor Ketellapper, the EPA's team leader for the Libby Asbestos site, told Lincoln County Commissioners last week the activity-based testing (ABT), which includes such manual activities as raking or moving chips with a shovel, showed only one positive result for asbestos.

That result was 0.001 (one-1,000ths) percent, according to Ketellapper, who attended the Commissioners meeting.

Ketellapper has indicated that miniscule amount "poses little risk" and they "are not a significant source of asbestos contamination."

The purpose of the activity-based testing is to simulate the sort of action Libby residents may have experienced as they moved these wood chips from the Port Authority site to their homes and yards as much of the substance has been used as landscaping mulch and in children's play areas, including under swingsets and playground equipment. Libby City Councilman D.C. Orr has indicated he has used the wood chips under a swingset he keeps for his grandchildren.

This summer, an Associated Press report about the contamination made the news wires. Samplings for those tests were taken from various depths of the heaping mounds.

As asbestos is a naturally occurring substance, Commissioner Tony Berget reiterated a report he heard that past testing results indicated asbestos levels higher in areas other than Libby.

"I heard asbestos levels in Helena were higher than in Libby," Berget said of the tests. "Since it is out there (in nature)," I'd like to know about some of these areas, like Idaho Falls or Spokane," Berget said looking at Carol L. Campbell, the Assistant Regional Administrator for the EPA. Campbell was the highest-ranking EPA official at the meeting.

Campbell said she understood Berget's interest in the breadth of environmental asbestos, but she said she preferred to spend funding earmarked for Libby in Libby.

"I'd like to see the money for Libby spent here in Libby," Campbell said.

Campbell said the EPA is furthering its water-testing program on the streams and creeks that feed the Kootenai River, as high concentrations of asbestos and vermiculite have been discovered in those waters. Earlier this summer, the EPA reported up to 40 times the highest recommended concentration of asbestos was registered from waters that feed the Kootenai.

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